Abstract: Cross-Cultural Semiotic Analysis of American Ideological Values

The American Dream had long been sought after by many international audiences. With increasing globalization, exposure to media and content through various channels, and recent historical events, American values have increasingly become accessible to audiences worldwide. For some, a reinforcement of those ideals and values. For others, a deterrence further away from them. Since the American ideologies have been spread across the world, it is significant to examine how these ideologies are interpreted cross-culturally. “Fighting to protect American freedoms/rights democracy” has been used by American politicians and such statements can have varying interpretations based on background and cultural upbringing. Without conscious notice of these potential differences, statements of this kind could produce negative intercultural interactions and worldviews.

Semiotics will be used as the theoretical framework within the critical paradigm because of its connection to signs, symbols, and meaning-making. This framework helps the study to have a clear understanding of the various interpretations of the same artifact when it comes to key terms and phrases. By giving a key ideological term or phrase, we will discover how American worldviews are interpreted similarly or differently across cultures.

For this study, the researchers will conduct interviews among five different nationalities: Arab, Bosnian and Herzegovinian, Brazilian, Japanese, and American individuals. There will be four individuals per nationality, totaling 20 participants. For each nationality, there will be two men and two women. Two individuals (one man and one woman) living in that respective country will be interviewed and two individuals (one man and one woman) of that nationality living in the United States of America will be interviewed. For example, a Japanese man and woman in Japan, and a Japanese man and woman in the United States of America will all be interviewed. The same concept will follow for the other nationalities. However, for the American participants, two participants living in United States of America will be interviewed, while the other two American participants live overseas. The researchers will speak in English or in the participants’ native language, as needed. Though the actual ideological phrases used by American figures will not be translated, in order to avoid taking meaning away through translation. The age range of participants will be between 22-35 years old.

Each participant will receive a preliminary survey, which will serve to evaluate their interpretations and viewpoints of key American ideological words or phrases, such as “democracy,” “freedom,” and “American Dream.” Following the preliminary survey, interviews will be done with each of the participants, where the key ideological words or phrases will be given in a quotations that were actually spoken by an American figure, such as politicians, social movement leaders, and celebrities. The quotations will be taken directly from American speakers without altering the words in any way. The interviews will be done both online and in-person. Online interviews will be done via Skype in cases where the participant cannot be reached in-person due to travel.
The goal of the study is to reveal the meanings of pertinent American cultural and political ideologies across cultures. Although the concepts (such as “freedom”) exist in other countries and cultures, our study focuses on how people with different cultural backgrounds assign meaning to American context of those ideologies.